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Tuesday, 21 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 40 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/344)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/89, A/58/434)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/133, A/58/224, A/58/225, A/58/273, A/58/280, A/58/285, A/58/286, A/58/358)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/332)

(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/320)

(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/88 and A/58/88/Corr.1)

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I thank Mr. Hunte for his efforts in directing the deliberations of this session. I also thank the Secretary-General for his valuable and comprehensive reports on this item, which will help towards the success of our deliberations. We also wish to associate ourselves with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The United Arab Emirates has been following closely the relentless efforts of the United Nations to provide humanitarian relief assistance to countries affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters. According to reports of the Secretary-General, the number of individuals in need of emergency and relief development assistance has increased over the past year, due to the outbreak of wars and conflicts in previously untroubled regions, such as in parts of Africa and in Iraq, as well as the continued violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and the severe

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decline in economic and humanitarian conditions in many developing countries, especially the African Horn, which has been affected by drought and the spread of HIV/AIDS. All of this requires a doubling of the United Nations humanitarian assistance to help those countries cope with disasters and tragic human conditions.

In this regard, we express our deep sorrow over the deaths by terrorism and violence of United Nations employees as they carried out their noble missions in such countries as Iraq and other areas affected by armed conflicts. We are also concerned about the obstacles and dangers that impede access to affected areas and people in need of help, as in the occupied Palestinian territories. In that respect, we support the measures taken by the United Nations to enhance awareness of the importance of safeguarding the security of its employees while they do their noble humanitarian work.

We also commend efforts by specialized agencies of the United Nations to coordinate humanitarian relief operations and stress the need to double international efforts to strengthen emergency and development assistance to developing and poor countries, which are the most grievously affected by disasters and armed conflicts because of the vulnerability of their economic and ecological systems. We also call on the donor countries to fulfil their commitments to helping the affected countries and to coordinate and strengthen their assistance in the context of a development strategy that aims at building systems capable of coping with natural disasters more efficiently. We also urge the international community to strengthen international humanitarian law and human rights conventions in order to eliminate the root causes of armed conflicts and wars, which have disastrous repercussions and impede development.

Given its sense of responsibility for and sympathy towards the international community, the United Arab Emirates has always met its financial obligations to the United Nations and the peacekeeping budget. It also donates annually to United Nations bodies and agencies involved in humanitarian and development activities. Under the leadership of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the country, the Government of the United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to providing emergency relief and long-term development assistance, through a number of specialized national institutions, to developing and poor countries and those affected by natural disasters and conflict. It is estimated that the country spends 3.5 per cent of its annual gross national product on foreign aid, which includes emergency relief and development assistance, donations and loans to 50 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. Coordinated airborne relief assistance, land caravans and mobile field hospitals, such as those sponsored by the State and by the Red Crescent of the United Arab Emirates, have helped to deliver timely emergency assistance to areas in conflict, such as Iraq, Palestine, Kosovo and Afghanistan, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Lebanon, Sudan and Somalia.

In an initiative of the President of the State, the United Arab Emirates allocated $50 million to dismantle 130,000 landmines in South Lebanon in 2001. As of October 2002, the unit had succeeded in removing and defusing 17,793 landmines.

The United Arab Emirates recognizes the need of affected countries to rehabilitate and reconstruct after containing the consequences of disasters. Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates has always extended soft loans and donations to developing and affected countries to build dams, power stations, roads, ports and fully equipped residential units. It has also donated $30 million to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, in addition to in-kind assistance to support the country's economic and political stability. The United Arab Emirates continues to extend financial and material assistance to help the Palestinian people rebuild their cities and villages and provides them with jobs. The United Arab Emirates plays an essential role in the process of reconstructing Iraq. It is part of the core group of donor countries to participate in the conference of donor countries for the reconstruction of Iraq, to be held on 23 and 24 of this month in Madrid.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned about the dire and deteriorating humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people, which are caused by the Israeli policy of killing, destroying and blockading cities, and obstructing humanitarian assistance to the people in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call on the international community to compel Israel immediately to stop the killing and aggression, to end the practice of closure and siege and to remove the separation wall, which will lead to a humanitarian and economic disaster in the West Bank. We also demand that Israel allow international humanitarian organizations to deliver the needed

emergency assistance to the Palestinian people, in accordance with international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention. We also urge the donor countries and the influential financial institutions to increase the amount and quality of humanitarian assistance delivered to the Palestinian people in order to save them from a tragedy deplored by the human conscience and rejected by international humanitarian law.

Mr. Siv (United States): I thank the Secretary-General for his thorough and wide-ranging report on humanitarian assistance. He has pointed to the alleviation of certain humanitarian crises this year. This includes progress in the return home of refugees and internally displaced persons in places such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Angola. We are heartened by this. In addition, we welcome the improvements cited by the Secretary-General in Angola and Sudan.

The people of Sudan have suffered for 25 years under a deadly combination of drought and civil war. Two years ago, under the leadership of President Bush, the United States initiated a new push for peace and stability in that nation. We utilized humanitarian inroads in places such as the Nuba Mountains to help build a bridge to peace, contributing $163 million to humanitarian assistance for Sudan in 2003. We worked with the warring parties, other Member States and United Nations agencies. Today, this multi-pronged approach is paying off. Today, the people of Sudan can see a glimmer of hope for their future.

More recently, the international community has used many tools to help Liberia's people take back their country. These have included multilateral diplomatic efforts, bilateral political pressure, the deployment of peacekeepers and the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the process. As a result, there have been many improvements since we met in Geneva this summer. After an initially challenging start, the humanitarian community demonstrated just how much it can achieve when working together. Over the past year, the United States has provided almost $50 million in humanitarian aid to the Liberian people. At the same time, there remain considerable challenges to the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection to all communities affected by conflict or disaster.

The lack of safe access to many of those communities around the globe continues to plague humanitarian agencies and to cost lives, including those of humanitarian workers. The year 2003 will be long and sadly remembered for the unprovoked and cowardly attack in Baghdad, committed against staff members of the United Nations on 19 August. We have all seen the devastating consequences of this tragedy for individual colleagues and for our community of nations. We commend United Nations agencies and their staff for the resilience and dedication they have demonstrated in choosing to persevere in Iraq and in other conflict zones. This bears witness to the strength of the Organization.

The United States holds the improvement of security conditions in Iraq among its highest priorities. Our commitment to the safety and security of humanitarian workers worldwide is evidenced by Security Council resolution 1502 (2003). It was adopted unanimously and after much careful reflection on the responsibilities that lie with each of us.

There are other challenges, including the need to implement the United Nations code of conduct to prevent the exploitation, including sexual exploitation, and abuse of those we aim to assist; the need to uphold humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence while working with the many actors in humanitarian response and recognizing their diverse roles; and the need to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. To accomplish this, we must ensure that our aid is more timely, appropriate and coordinated. We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the agenda for further change and the opportunity to thoroughly examine the role of the Resident Coordinator system in humanitarian response.

We recognize the need to adhere to policies of good donorship and remain committed to basing our funding on the sound assessment and prioritization of needs on the ground. The United States continues to be one of the largest donors to the multilateral system. We encourage all donors to work together in continuing to strengthen the strategic and operational coordination role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We have valued Kenzo Oshima as a colleague and welcome Jan Egeland as the new head of that important Office.

Finally, every year there are reports indicating that the impact of natural disasters is being heightened. Every year there are more people living on our planet. Many of those people have no choice but to settle on disaster-prone lands. The responsibility for us, as Governments and as Members of the United Nations, is clear. Each country should assess its own vulnerabilities to hazards and prepare and mitigate to the best of its ability. Where the dangers are greatest, we need to invest in mitigation measures to lessen the impact of natural hazards, to install early warning systems and to insist on enforcement of appropriate building codes. At the international level, we must all work with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. With adequate preparation and cooperation, nations can reduce risks, thereby saving lives.

The year 2003 has seen improvements in several long-standing humanitarian crises. Together, let us work towards the same and more in 2004.

Mr. Laurin (Canada): The Government of Canada is pleased to have the opportunity to address the General Assembly on the subject of strengthening the coordination of the humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. Let me begin by expressing Canada's satisfaction at the appointment of the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland. Mr. Egeland's experience has well prepared him to lead the United Nations humanitarian system and its partners in responding to the challenges and dilemmas that are inherent in humanitarian work.

Events over the past year have demonstrated that the need for concerted and effective humanitarian action has never been stronger. As Member States, there is much we can do to support Mr. Egeland and the dedicated humanitarian professionals working for United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations. Key issues requiring our urgent collective attention include the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel, respect for international humanitarian law, access to affected populations and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The United Nations system has made important progress over the past year in developing measures to improve staff safety and security, including through training and the implementation of the Minimum Operating Security Standards. However, in the wake of the senseless attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, it is clear that these efforts must be strengthened. That attack constituted a new low in respect for human life, for the principles of the United Nations Charter and for international humanitarian law. It demonstrated a need not only for improved threat-assessment capacity, but also for a review of current approaches to security management. We encourage the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, in collaboration with United Nations agencies and other partners, to develop practical approaches for consideration by Member States. Security is an implicit cost of doing business. We support the Secretary-General's appeal to States to contribute to the Trust Fund for Security of Staff Members of the United Nations System and security line items in individual consolidated appeals. We further encourage States to amend their import restrictions as required to allow United Nations operations to fully implement the Minimum Operating Security Standards.

While we focus on operational requirements, States and other actors must also act to address legal gaps. We strongly support the new momentum building behind efforts to broaden the scope of the 1994 United Nations Convention on the Safety and Security of United Nations and Associated Personnel. Canada also urges those States that have not yet ratified the 1994 Convention and implemented it in national legislation to do so without delay. Furthermore, we call on States to ensure that the perpetrators of attacks against United Nations and associated personnel are brought to justice and that they do not find safe haven in any Member State.

The dangers faced by humanitarian workers can be seen as part of a broader trend towards lack of respect for international humanitarian law, including humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Where this lack of respect stems from ignorance or misunderstanding, humanitarian organizations have often been successful in negotiating access by communicating the nature of their work. More disturbing are contexts in which armed groups are actively hostile to humanitarian action and in which forced displacement, manipulation of food aid and attacks on civilians are deliberately pursued. It is clear that the international community must continue to struggle to meet such challenges.

We are not without means. Research, advocacy and experience have provided the international community with an impressive range of tools to enhance the protection of civilians. Our most effective response in most circumstances remains promotion and implementation of human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law. These efforts should be undertaken in tandem with support to the practical steps humanitarian agencies can take to enhance protection at the field level. Where these agencies prove unable to overcome determined opposition, we have recourse to traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, including good offices, capacity-building, preventive military deployments and peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions.

Canada is pleased that the Security Council continues to promote the protection of civilians in armed conflict agenda, as was seen in the robust mandates conferred on the peace support missions sent to Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional organizations have considerable potential to further that agenda, as shown by the emphasis on protection of civilians in the mandate conferred upon the Economic Community of West African States by the Security Council in Côte d'Ivoire. On a similar note, we should not ignore the capacity of individual States to influence other States or armed groups to modify their behaviour.

(*spoke in French*)

Despite setbacks, coordination of humanitarian action continues to improve both at headquarters and in the field. Canada is pleased by the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in collaboration with its partners, in particular the work to further improve the Consolidated Appeals Process. We applaud the contingency planning for Iraq. We welcome the work of the OCHA Internal Displacement Unit and the collaborative approach it has promoted to meeting the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons. Canada remains convinced that this approach represents the most effective strategy and urges all agencies to support its work in this regard.

We believe that OCHA's collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, has led to more effective strategies for disaster preparedness, mitigation and response. Likewise, OCHA's advice on civilian-military issues this past year has benefited both humanitarian organizations and States. Canada welcomes the development of the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies. The Guidelines provide a useful framework by clarifying ways in which military forces can be directed in support of humanitarian activities without undermining respect for humanitarian principles. Canada commends OCHA and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for their work on these Guidelines and encourages them to continue to promote their use.

With respect to the IASC, we believe that its work continues to demonstrate its value as a forum for humanitarian agencies to develop responses to global challenges. Canada welcomes the work of the IASC in improving coordinated and effective responses to HIV/AIDS. On the issue of sexual and gender-based violence, the IASC has shown commendable leadership. The 2002 Plan of Action outlining minimum standards of behaviour, now complemented by the bulletin of the Secretary-General, should serve as a guide for all United Nations agencies and States in the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. Action must be devoted to follow-up on this work, including by ensuring the six core principles are integrated into programme design, execution, monitoring and evaluation.

Other noteworthy inter-agency work is being undertaken by the joint Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs/United Nations Development Group Working Group on Transition Issues. Canada hopes that the Working Group's recommendations will lead to improvements in how the United Nations system responds to countries emerging from conflict.

While considerable progress is being made, inter-agency rivalry and competition for finite resources persist. Further efforts are required to enhance coordination and coherence among humanitarian actors. In addition to supporting the work of OCHA and the IASC, there are many ways in which States can assist these efforts. This past year has seen considerable attention devoted to means by which needs-based approaches to humanitarian action can be improved, including through the Consolidated Appeals Process. Both the Humanitarian Financing Work

Programme and the International Meeting on Good Humanitarian Donorship have helped identify ways to address weaknesses of the current humanitarian system. These include capacity-building of affected States, broader beneficiary participation, greater accountability of donors and affected States and harmonization of reporting requirements. We will work within our own bureaucracy, and collectively with other donor Governments, towards the implementation of the principles and good practices that were agreed at Stockholm.

In conclusion, despite the considerable challenges which continue to confront us, we are moving in the right direction. Roles and responsibilities of affected States, donors, the different parts of the United Nations system and partners in humanitarian action are becoming clearer. This clarity lends itself not only to mutual accountability, but also and above all to accountability to those we are trying to assist. They are counting on our commitment. It is incumbent upon us to respond.

Mr. Aguilar Zinser (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): The report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations cautions that, over the past 30 years, the natural disasters that afflict the world have tripled in frequency and that there has also been an increase in the number of people affected by them. It also notes, however, that the number of deaths from natural disasters has declined as a result of actions to prevent potential catastrophes and of investments made in preventive mechanisms.

These are important figures. They show that work undertaken at the national and international levels to prevent natural disasters can indeed contribute to reducing the negative impact of such disasters. That is why Mexico believes it essential that we continue to strengthen the international community's mechanisms of cooperation in order to prevent and cope with natural disasters. It is necessary to enhance national, regional and United Nations system capacities and to strengthen the role of our Organization as the coordinator of the international community's efforts on behalf of the countries affected, in accordance with the priorities established by the authorities of those States themselves.

In Mexico and in Central America, cooperation has yielded positive results in the field of prevention and in disaster relief assistance. International cooperation in disaster relief, as we see it, should be integrated into a long-term context and a thorough consideration of the conditions of vulnerability that, in many instances, explain the magnitude of the damage caused by such disasters.

We must therefore view the problem from the perspective of sustainable development, which is indeed the best defence against the ravages of nature and other disasters because it gives societies, through the actions of their States, the tools they need to increase their capacity to respond, to coordinate activities and to make good use of resources, thus reducing the vulnerability of communities to disasters.

In addition to efforts to reduce the vulnerability of peoples to natural disasters, it is necessary to eradicate poverty. There is a direct link between vulnerability to natural disasters and socio-economic conditions. It is a fact that poor communities usually find themselves in situations of far greater risk and vulnerability. In his report on the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Secretary-General indicates that many countries are rapidly accumulating latent risks arising out of growing population densities in dangerous areas, the elimination of environmental protection capacities that contribute to mitigating dangers, and the emergence of new social and economic vulnerabilities due to immigration, urban development and unequal economic growth.

In this regard, it is also important to stress the direct causal relationship between the vulnerability of communities to natural disasters and the destruction of the environment that occurs around such communities. Deforestation is among the most serious causes of vulnerability to natural disasters in our countries. Hence the importance of integrating international cooperation in disaster and vulnerability reduction into an comprehensive approach to reducing poverty and to protecting and preserving the environment.

With respect to man-made disasters, it is important to emphasize that various United Nations bodies — in particular the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — are considering the question of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and of humanitarian personnel. The Security Council, however, has a special responsibility in this regard. As has been pointed out here, it has become increasingly clear and explicit that the Security Council is interested

in including in its mandates mechanisms for the protection of civilians in conflict situations. We have seen this in the Council's actions on the principal conflicts now on its agenda.

Nevertheless, in connection with the protection of humanitarian personnel of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, the Security Council has been slow to act. It was not until the recent adoption of resolution 1502 (2003), which was promoted by Mexico, that the Council specifically addressed the safety and protection of humanitarian personnel in situations of armed conflicts. The terrible events of 19 August in Baghdad highlighted the urgent need for the Council to be endowed with appropriate instruments to ensure the security and protection of personnel doing humanitarian work. Such instruments could be made available both to the relevant humanitarian organizations and to the United Nations so that countries and parties to a conflict might understand their responsibilities with regard to the protection of humanitarian personnel.

Resolution 1502 (2003) condemns all acts of violence committed against humanitarian personnel, and deliberate attacks in particular. It reaffirms the obligation of all parties involved in an armed conflict to comply fully with the rules and principles of international law related to the protection of such personnel. It recalls the need for States to end impunity for those who perpetrate such acts. As a result of the adoption of the resolution, the Secretary-General must now address, in all his country-specific situation reports, the issue of the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and its associated personnel, including specific acts of violence against such personnel, remedial actions taken to prevent similar incidents and actions taken to identify and hold accountable those who commit such acts. Moreover, he is requested to explore and propose additional ways and means to enhance the safety and security of personnel of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations, who provide vital assistance in conflict situations.

The situation of personnel providing such assistance has deteriorated in recent years. A source of particular concern is the increase in deliberate attacks and the fact that they impact directly on the neutrality and impartiality inherent in humanitarian work. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian personnel are classified as war crimes in the Statute of the International Criminal Court and in resolution 1502 (2003) itself. Such a definition seeks to make it extremely clear that humanitarian personnel are playing a central role in protecting and assisting civilian populations affected by armed conflict.

That is why ensuring the security of personnel in charge of humanitarian assistance is an obligation of the warring parties and should be a fundamental task of States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations. The United Nations must continue to strengthen its coordination with the agencies and other governmental and non-governmental organizations on the ground.

Mr. Oyugi (Kenya): I take this opportunity to commend Mr. Hunte on the able manner in which he continues to guide our work. Let me reassure him of my delegation's support and cooperation.

We wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/58/344, submitted under the agenda item on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, which is the subject of our deliberations.

My delegation notes with grave concern the tragic loss of life of humanitarian staff in their service to the international community. It is our view that humanitarian staff should be allowed to operate in safe and secure environments. That is one of the operational prerequisites for the successful delivery of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, therefore, we support the Secretary-General's suggestion that it is crucial for Governments and non-State actors to provide stronger commitments to the humanitarian community to ensure that those responsible for attacks on humanitarian staff are promptly brought to book.

The subject before us is a cross-cutting issue that touches many of us in this Assembly. Looking at the Secretary-General's report, we note that developments in the humanitarian environment during the past year have been mixed in that some long-standing conflicts are moving towards a resolution, while, in other parts of the world, there is an unfortunate re-emergence of other conflicts. Protracted conflicts therefore continue to worsen the suffering of civilians in general and of women and children in particular. Furthermore, other challenges have emerged that have aggravated human suffering. These include the ravages of drought and food shortages. The spread of HIV/AIDS in situations

of armed conflict is a development that is challenging humanitarian aid and requires the international community to rethink its approach to emergencies.

The Secretary-General requires the support of all of us in his efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Kenya has played a leading role in coordinating the delivery of humanitarian assistance in conflict areas in our region. We have extended assistance, notably to southern Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name just a few. My delegation concurs with the Secretary-General's observation that

> "in the area of natural disasters, improvements in operational tools need to be reinforced by greater cooperation between the international community and regional and national response actors so as to ensure better synergies in disaster management". (*A/58/89, para. 3*)

Kenya supports the efforts of the United Nations to assist Member States and regional arrangements in responding to natural disasters. Due to the many disasters that have visited our country, mechanisms have been put in place in order for us to be able to respond appropriately. An example of this is the Disaster Preparedness Centre, which is part of the Office of the President, for the purpose of facilitating coordination. The Centre is charged, amongst other things, with the responsibility of capacity-building, the development of early warning systems, the monitoring of natural disasters and overall natural disaster preparedness.

Kenya organized the first regional meeting for disaster management in 2000. The meeting brought together civilian and military leaders from 11 countries. It was organized in conjunction with the Government of the United States and it has since become an annual event known as "The Golden Spear". This event is organized in recognition of the realization that civilian defence assets could be effectively and quickly deployed in the event of a disaster.

We support the relevant resolutions and call on the international community to provide assistance in response to the United Nations 2003 Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the relief and rehabilitation of affected countries. We commend the efforts made so far by the international community to mitigate these disasters. In Africa, these efforts have been manifested in various schemes, such as the economic assistance for the reconstruction of Djibouti and the special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Congo. There is also the case of the emerging humanitarian assistance for the situation in Ethiopia and the rehabilitation of Somalia.

On the issue of gender mainstreaming, my delegation supports the call for integrating a gender perspective into the full range of emergency operations. The effective targeting of emergency humanitarian assistance to women and girls in refugee camps is critical. This, in our view, should be started from the initial stages of a conflict and continue right through to the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Kenya notes with concern the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse arising in complex emergencies and armed conflict. We support the Plan of Action prepared by the Task Force on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises. It is expected that all United Nations civilian staff members will subscribe to the six core principles representing the minimum standards of behaviour on their tours of duty. At the same time, it is hoped that the United Nations will enforce the disciplinary procedures that are currently being formulated.

In conclusion, I would like to say that my delegation supports the recommendations outlined in the report of the Secretary-General and will continue to play its part in this regard. However, it is our ardent belief that, if humanitarian assistance is to be of use, it has to be timely, adequate and supported by predictable and sustainable resources. More often than not, humanitarian assistance has been slow, inadequate and unpredictable, thus negating its effectiveness for recipients.

Mr. Fuks (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of addressing this General Assembly on behalf of my Government on the occasion of our consideration of agenda item 40. In this respect, my delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/58/320 on the "White Helmets" initiative, which has been so favourably received by this Assembly.

I wish also to express my sincere recognition of the continuous support given to the initiative by the United Nations Volunteers and other system agencies in the countries in which we have worked together.

I should also like to point out the sustained trust and support the initiative has enjoyed from the United Nations Development Programme in its undertakings. I trust that the actions carried out by the initiative will contribute to extending the cooperation between our countries to our peoples and our Governments. I also wish to mention the close cooperation provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in New York and Geneva.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, White Helmets has proven in its activities and results to be a valuable tool in the areas of cooperation, financing and mobilization of resources. I wish to express my gratitude for the report, which clearly shows the initiative's good intentions and its ongoing progress. This experience is also built on an ever-broadening network of agreements and institutional contacts with, among others, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the European Parliament and the African Union.

I wish to express my gratitude for the views set forth by the Secretary-General in his report, which confirm the conceptual validity of the previously identified, trained and standby White Helmets volunteers as a useful mechanism available to the United Nations to provide immediate support for its relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities. It is within that context that my Government will introduce a draft resolution on the White Helmets initiative for the consideration of the General Assembly.

This is an excellent opportunity for my Government to ratify its commitment to peace and the fight against hunger and extreme poverty, one of the Millennium Development Goals. It is also a propitious occasion to express the conviction that the White Helmets initiative deserves to continue receiving the sustained support of the members of the international community. As the Secretary-General has pointed out on more than one occasion, civil society's active participation in the United Nations activities is indispensable to the success of humanitarian disaster and conflict relief missions. In some circumstances, this participation not only mitigates damages, but can help avoid unwanted situations.

The availability of White Helmet Volunteers is a useful, effective and efficient mechanism for participating in such activity in an orderly and ever-growing way. It is one of many convergent lines of action carried out by different countries. In view of this, we come once again from the South of the world to this General Assembly in the firm conviction that the revitalization of this forum of global representation is essential to consolidating international law and human rights as the rational instruments with which conflicts can be solved and threats faced effectively.

A few weeks ago, before this General Assembly, our country stood firmly by its commitment in the face of the greatest challenge of our time — avoiding a

> "widening of the gap between the rich and poor [reflecting] a grim reality of unprecedented poverty and social exclusion". (*A/58/PV.11, p. 7*)

The Argentine commitment to making globalization work towards the well-being of all was also made clear.

The White Helmets initiative is a mechanism towards attaining that goal. It encompasses all men and women of goodwill in the world, every person with a social conscience. In stressing that

> "new challenges call for different and creative solutions so as not to be left behind by changes in the world in the technological, economical, social and undoubtedly even cultural fields", (*ibid., p. 9*)

the decision to support every effort to attain those goals was stated before every country in this universal forum. Those are the central tasks on the international agenda. We accept the challenge of finding new ideas for a new world, combining different ideas and creating the practical means to put them at the disposal of the nations we represent. That is our duty and our challenge.

In that context, maintaining an international cooperation mechanism is no longer merely about relations among countries with different development conditions. It is no longer enough merely to demonstrate the high level of professionalism of our rapid response teams. The time has come to reaffirm our vocation for solidarity and giving. That is especially true for those of us who have received the support of various actors in the midst of our recent

crises. We have the obligation and the resolve to cooperate with the rest of our fellow countries. With the concurrence of the international community, we are willing to make an effort in the maintenance of that tool for horizontal cooperation.

As many Latin American leaders have stated before this very forum, the different rules that guide world affairs are changing and there is a sense of shared responsibility in the face of the difficult conditions most peripheral countries are experiencing. It is important that the international community continue to debate the nature of its role in these circumstances and the profile of the volunteers who participate in international efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to carry out humanitarian activities in natural or man-made emergencies.

White Helmets seeks to make a contribution to that exchange, to collaborate in the construction of adequate models that will help attain the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, and to support activities that mitigate damage caused by tragedies and disasters.

When faced with a crisis, people generate solidary and participative response experiences in the productive, health and social fields. Volunteerism can integrate the protagonists of these everyday epics so as to benefit from their experiences and develop new models for cooperation. This new and not yet fully explored network must, like other initiatives, incorporate representatives who have experienced and faced these crises, misery, poverty and natural disasters. It includes training that will allow the formalization of responses and thus enable the transmission of tools that have emerged from the heart of a crisis to similar populations. It seeks to build working teams that will go to work wherever they are needed. It also contemplates sowing the seeds of a model implementation and organization to be replicated by the men and women of the country that has made the request. I reiterate that we accept the challenge of finding new ideas for a new world, combining different ideas and creating the practical means to put them at the disposal of the nations we represent. That is our duty.

Lastly, I wish to convey once again my Government's deepest thanks to Mr. Hunte for the support this Assembly has given the White Helmets initiative and to all those who, in one way or another, contribute to alleviating world hunger, an objective that binds all men of goodwill.

Mr. Haraguchi (Japan): Let me first express my deep respect for all United Nations personnel devoted to humanitarian assistance activities. They are making an admirable contribution to the effort to help people in need, even at the risk of losing their lives. Despite their sincere efforts, however, there are often cases where humanitarian assistance does not fully produce the expected results due to a lack of coordination among donors and United Nations agencies tackling the same crisis from different angles.

We are of the view that close coordination among donors and various humanitarian agencies and a seamless transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction are crucial to achieving effective and mutually reinforcing results, given the limited resources available. Japan once again calls on all donors and humanitarian agencies to work closely together, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) playing a central role in coordinating them.

In this connection, the Japanese Government welcomes the report of the Commission on Human Security submitted to the Secretary-General last May, which very ably addresses the important issue of the need for United Nations agencies to deal with a crisis in a comprehensive and integrated manner among other subjects. Our delegation took the liberty of sending a copy of the report to all the missions in New York and it is our hope that the representatives here will have a chance to read it. The report says that

> "assistance is often compartmentalized for different categories of people — refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons, demobilized combatants — reflecting the mandates of agencies providing assistance, not overall needs".

The areas of assistance are also divided by the mandates of agencies into food, education, medical care and housing, just to mention a few.

In reality, however, all forms of activity aimed at helping people in need affect each other. In order to address the real needs of suffering people in an effective manner, United Nations agencies need to engage in their dedicated work in a more integrated and comprehensive manner.

It is also important to ensure a seamless transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction. Madam Sadako Ogata, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Co-chair of the Commission on Human Security, has challenged the notion of "post-conflict" and urged us to rethink the current working arrangements, which have been formulated in accordance with a rather artificial and often misleading demarcation between activities for conflict situations and those to be implemented in post-conflict situations.

Although the focus of activities may shift in time, humanitarian and development assistance needs to be implemented throughout the spectrum of the conflict and post-conflict stages of any humanitarian crisis. With a focus on assisting people rather than adhering to institutional mandates, we will be able to produce results that address the problems people face in their entirety and in the most effective manner.

Based on this idea, the Japanese Government has launched an innovative initiative to provide comprehensive regional development assistance to Afghanistan, under the name the "Ogata Initiative". This initiative aims at arranging and implementing specific, feasible projects emphasizing regional recovery and community empowerment in close cooperation with agencies including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Food Programme, under the ownership of the Afghan people. The projects cover a broad range of areas such as temporary housing and water-supply systems for the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, and income-generation and food-for-work programmes for comprehensive regional development. Through the experience we obtain from this initiative, I hope that we will be able to further develop a methodology for applying the conceptual framework of human security to concrete projects on the ground that reflect recipients' interests.

It is also true that, no matter how efficiently the relevant United Nations agencies coordinate among themselves, humanitarian assistance activities cannot be carried out fully without adequate financial resources. Here lies the reason why efforts to ensure public understanding are important. Deeper and broader understanding and support for humanitarian needs among the public will make it easier for countries to make contributions to humanitarian crises. To this end, it is essential that United Nations agencies take special care to inform the general public of the tangible and positive results which their activities are expected to produce in the lives of people suffering through humanitarian crises.

In order to realize broader support for humanitarian activities that reflect the diversity of the international community, it is also important to try to increase the number of new donors, as well as to enhance the geographical balance with respect to humanitarian personnel employed by United Nations organizations. At the same time, it is important not to forget the price of our failure to act on what are sometimes called "forgotten crises". When CNN broadcasts news about a new crisis that includes shocking footage of people in distress, it immediately attracts world attention.

On the other hand, even if a humanitarian tragedy continues for a long time, very few will know or be concerned about it unless there is media coverage. Japan hopes that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other agencies further improve the way, for example, through the Consolidated Appeal Process, to address forgotten crises more effectively. For its part, Japan continues to extend humanitarian assistance to regions less in the public eye, such as Southern Africa, either through United Nations agencies or bilaterally.

In the wake of the violent attack on the United Nations offices in Baghdad, the issue of the security of humanitarian personnel has come to the forefront of international concern. Humanitarian personnel are often dispatched to dangerous front lines even at very early stages of a conflict in a spirit of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality. These are the people who are most deeply committed to the noble cause of helping others who are helpless and suffering, and no attack on these people, whatever the reason, should ever be tolerated. We have to bear in mind that no effective humanitarian assistance is possible without their presence on the ground.

It is indispensable to ensure the safety of personnel engaging in United Nations humanitarian operations. Japan welcomes Security Council resolution 1502 (2003) as an important step towards better protection of humanitarian personnel. It is necessary to conduct further discussions on this matter, including the question of expanding the scope of

protection under the existing Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Lastly, let me touch briefly upon the importance of disaster reduction. In addition to man-made conflict, natural disasters often cause grave humanitarian crises. Consequently, a significant portion of humanitarian assistance activities have as their goal the provision of relief to victims of natural disasters. But relief is only part of the answer. A wider range of measures is required to this end, including those aimed at reducing natural disasters, namely, mitigation, prevention and preparedness.

I have to stress that disaster reduction is also essential to the achievement of the overarching objectives of sustainable development. It is highly important as well in terms of carrying out the World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation, as well as following up the Ministerial Conference of the Third World Water Forum.

Japan has proposed that the General Assembly adopt a resolution enabling the United Nations to hold a world conference on disaster reduction in order to conclude the review of the 1994 Yokohama Strategy, adopted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, and upgrade it to more fully reflect the guiding principles of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to identify specific policy measures to put the Yokohama Strategy into effect. I would like to appeal to Member States to support this resolution. If it is accepted, Japan would like to host the conference in Kobe, in Hyogo Prefecture, in January 2005, in close coordination and cooperation with the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

Let me conclude my remarks by assuring you that Japan, together with other donor countries, will continue to be an active supporter of OCHA and other United Nations agencies engaged in humanitarian assistance.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Vladimir Tsalka, Chairman of the Committee on the problems of the consequences of the catastrophe at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Tsalka (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The General Assembly is today considering an issue of extreme importance both for my country and for the entire international community. With the Chernobyl catastrophe, human civilization entered a new stage of development in which technological risk, multiplied by the human factor, is jeopardizing its very existence.

At present, we all face a number of questions. Have we managed to find an adequate response to that challenge? What is the current situation in the most affected regions? What efforts need to be made to improve the situation and to increase the world community's ability to cope with a possible recurrence of large-scale radiation disasters?

Belarus, where nearly 2 million people still reside in contaminated areas, which make up 23 per cent of the country's territory, continues to undertake considerable efforts aimed at minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. The resources we must allocate every year to address post-Chernobyl problems are comparable to our education, health care and defence expenditures. Since 1991 we have spent more than $13 billion to mitigate the impact of Chernobyl. The estimated total damage amounts to $235 billion. It is obvious that those additional forced expenditures could be otherwise allocated for the purposes of the country's social and economic development.

Thanks to consistent and efficient measures at the national level, our country has managed to minimize the impact of radiation. The radiological situation in Belarus is stable and is regularly monitored. However, the Chernobyl catastrophe entails a range of complex problems for the health sector and for the ecological management and economic development of the affected regions.

There is some degree of uncertainty with regard to preserving the health of people living in contaminated areas and the steps that should be taken in that regard. There is still no international consensus regarding the long-term impact of low-level doses of radiation on people. That cannot but be a matter of concern.

We highly commend the informative and mobilizing role played by the United Nations in creating momentum to overcome the aftermath of Chernobyl. It is no coincidence that the first resolution of the General Assembly on this issue, resolution 45/190, which established the political and institutional basis to develop full-fledged international cooperation

on Chernobyl-related issues, was called a resolution of humanism, solidarity and charity.

The Secretary-General's report (A/58/332) under consideration comprehensively reflects the measures that have been undertaken by the Governments of affected States in collaboration with the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system, as well as of the current difficulties in the process of implementing resolution 56/109 on the subject of Chernobyl, which was adopted during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

The three most affected countries — Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine — have initiated an additional draft resolution on Chernobyl for adoption by the General Assembly at the fifty-eighth session. That is a logical and consistent step towards the implementation of the new strategy proposed in the United Nations report entitled "The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident: A Strategy for Recovery", envisaging a gradual shift from the provision of humanitarian aid to ensuring the sustainable development of the affected regions.

The implementation of that strategy is based upon a comprehensive approach to addressing post-Chernobyl problems that includes a variety of measures in the areas of health, social and psychological rehabilitation, environmental recovery and economic development. That approach is based on the concept of the active involvement of the affected population in the rehabilitation process.

The Government of Belarus fully supports that strategy and calls for enhanced international cooperation, which is a powerful instrument in alleviating the consequences of the catastrophe. I would like to emphasize that the most important task at the current stage is to translate theoretical recommendations into real projects and collaborative programmes. Such work is already under way in Belarus.

The declaration on the principles of the international Cooperation for Rehabilitation programme was signed at Minsk on 15 October 2003. The United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and a number of European non-governmental organizations are among the international participants in the programme. The European Commission, a number of States members of the European Union and other participants are expected to endorse the declaration in the near future. I would like to take this opportunity to urge all concerned countries and international organizations to take part in the implementation of the programme, which is the first of a new generation of Chernobyl-related initiatives aimed at ensuring sustainable development in the affected regions. I am confident that the United Nations has the necessary knowledge, technology and resources to implement development programmes in Chernobyl-affected regions.

The International Chernobyl Research and Information Network and the International Atomic Energy Agency's Chernobyl Forum, which were established this year, will certainly make a valuable contribution to the development of concrete programmes and projects. We expect that the outcome of their activities will help achieve a significant improvement in the living conditions of the people affected by this most serious radiation disaster.

I would also like to draw attention to the initiative announced recently in this Hall by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (see A/48/PV.20) to organize an international conference at Minsk in 2006 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe. I am confident that the conference will promote the further enhancement of international cooperation on Chernobyl-related issues on the basis of the principles of solidarity, mutually beneficial cooperation and efficient coordination of bilateral and multilateral initiatives. We would like to invite all those interested to take part in the preparation and work of that international conference.

In conclusion, I would like to invite Member States to support the draft resolution on Chernobyl. It is my hope that its noble principles will serve as a sound basis to strengthen the efforts of the international community to restore decent living conditions for the people affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Mr. Kim San-hoon (Republic of Korea): My delegation applauds the efforts of United Nations programmes, funds and agencies to provide and coordinate humanitarian assistance around the world. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for

providing us with a comprehensive set of reports on the various issues involved.

The United Nations has unparalleled authority and expertise in bringing life-saving assistance to people in vulnerable situations in the aftermath of disaster, civil strife and conflict. The Republic of Korea actively supports and takes part in those efforts. This year we have provided $33 million in humanitarian assistance through the United Nations, which includes $13 million in assistance for Iraq. We are also doing what we can bilaterally. In particular, this year we have provided humanitarian assistance for North Korea totalling around $230 million, which includes 300,000 tons of fertilizer, 400,000 tons of rice and $50 million of aid from civic groups.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Republic of Korea supports the central role played by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the areas of humanitarian advocacy, policy and coordination. We appreciate the consolidated appeal process and other mechanisms established to strengthen international cooperation for improved emergency preparedness and response. We have every confidence that the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, will actively build upon the accomplishments of his predecessor to further strengthen the humanitarian assistance work of the United Nations.

Our deliberations on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance are taking place following a sobering year. While the need for the United Nations to continue in its mission of leading humanitarian assistance around the world has not diminished in the least, the threat to the safety and security of its personnel in the field has been greatly heightened. That message was painfully brought home by the attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August. That attack was universally condemned, but we must do more than condemn. At the end of the day, the United Nations must emerge with strengthened, rather than weakened, resolve to carry on.

Member States must support the efforts of the United Nations by ensuring that the atrocity of 19 August does not go unpunished. Indeed, impunity for crimes committed against United Nations personnel must be brought to an end all around the world. It is deeply disheartening to learn that although more than 200 civilians have lost their lives to malicious acts while in the service for the United Nations since 1992, in only 21 cases has legal action been taken by the Member States concerned to bring the perpetrators to justice. Efforts must be redoubled to achieve a better record.

While our current focus remains on Iraq and a few other high-profile cases, the reports submitted by the Secretary-General under sub-items (a) to (e) of agenda item 40 remind us that a much larger part of humankind requires continued assistance. Let us not forget the "forgotten emergencies". It is rare that humanitarian assistance can be effective with short-term intervention.

A clear case in point is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has reached crisis levels in many developing countries. As was discussed during the high-level dialogue on the issue earlier during this session of the General Assembly, when HIV/AIDS combines with other elements of humanitarian need in many poor countries the result is an escalation of vulnerability. The fight against HIV/AIDS must therefore be integrated into efforts to overcome complex emergencies in those countries.

Furthermore, the Republic of Korea believes that humanitarian assistance should be seen in the long-term perspective of rehabilitation and development. In that regard, we view the transition from relief to development as an important area of work for the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian assistance. We welcome the outcome of the Economic and Social Council's deliberations on that issue. We hope that the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Development Group review of the issues involved will generate useful recommendations.

The Republic of Korea also emphasizes the importance of safe and unhampered access by humanitarian personnel to vulnerable populations, as well as of transparency in humanitarian assistance. It goes without saying that assistance must reach the people who need it. But that may not always be the case. We encourage the programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations to take further steps in that regard, knowing full well that the concrete steps to be taken will vary depending on the circumstances on the ground.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the abiding commitment of the Republic of Korea to supporting, and actively participating in, the humanitarian activities of the United Nations on the basis of the principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

Ms. Enkhtsetseg (Mongolia): The extent and nature of the developments and challenges in the humanitarian field have become increasingly complex over the past few years. Humanitarian emergencies, exacerbated by protracted and emerging conflicts, epidemics like HIV/AIDS and the frequent occurrence of natural disasters in many parts of the world, increasingly require an effective, adequate and timely response. In order to ensure the provision of such a response, we must deliberate on a number of issues raised by the Secretary-General in his reports submitted under the agenda item under consideration. Those issues include, among others, the transition from relief to development, humanitarian financing and the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, the protection of civilians, emergency preparedness, natural disasters, internally displaced persons and HIV/AIDS in the context of emergencies.

My delegation, while associating itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, wishes to make a few additional remarks.

For humanitarian assistance to be adequate it has to be commensurate with the needs of a given emergency, equitably distributed and effectively managed. It seems all three areas are interrelated, and all have room for further improvement. As seen from the reports of the Secretary-General, there is no consistency in the way in which humanitarian needs are currently assessed. Assessments vary to a great degree, not just between countries but also from year to year. In our view, although assessing the adequacy of humanitarian assistance in relation to need is a complex task, a common tool to analyse and diagnose a given situation has to be developed, and it must be consistently applied. That will help to restore the trust of donors in the value of assessments and will contribute towards ensuring a more equitable distribution of humanitarian assistance.

Another area requiring attention is the need to develop definitions that clearly identify eligible flows and provide a qualitative description of humanitarian assistance in order to redress the present disturbing situation when various uses of humanitarian assistance lead to a blurring of the distinction between humanitarian assistance and official development assistance. In that respect, my delegation wishes to emphasize the importance of the call made in the Economic and Social Council this year for humanitarian assistance to be provided in a way that is not to the detriment of resources made available for development cooperation.

My delegation strongly supports further enhancement of the central and unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership for operations and coordination of international humanitarian action. We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the important role it plays in responding to complex humanitarian crises around the world. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank former Under-Secretary-General Kenzo Oshima for his indomitable perseverance and able stewardship, as well as to welcome his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland. We wish him well in undertaking his onerous responsibilities.

The frequency and magnitude of natural disasters have considerably increased over the past three decades, resulting in enormous human and material loss. On the other hand, it is heartening to note that due to the development of better knowledge of hazardous conditions and the investment made in protective measures, a dramatic decline has been registered in the number of deaths from natural disasters in the same period. Nonetheless, capacity-building to enhance preparedness for, and reduce the impact of, natural disasters remains a major challenge, especially in developing countries. It is undisputable that the most effective way to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters is to have adequate capacity at both the national and local levels, including an efficient and credible early warning system, the accurate and speedy assessment of emergencies, with the active involvement of donors, timely advocacy and coherent coordination and greater synergy among all the major actors.

For a country with an extremely low population density, vast territory and weak infrastructure, Mongolia's high susceptibility to natural disasters results in added vulnerability. Mongolia is subject to a number of disasters, including droughts, forest fires, floods, earthquakes and *dzud*, which entails extremely

harsh winters with severe snowstorms. For the past 4 years, Mongolia has been hit hard by successive droughts in summer and *dzud* in winter. The toll on people has been immense, given the devastating economic and social consequences of natural disasters and their impact on a small and vulnerable economy caught in the midst of transition. During the first two winters, my Government, in collaboration with the United Nations, had to raise international support through emergency appeals. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank wholeheartedly all our bilateral and multilateral partners for their generous support and assistance to mitigate the consequences of the disaster.

As natural disasters — including *dzud*, droughts and forest fires — are recurring phenomena, my Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the financial support of donors, has endeavoured to develop a longer-term strategy for disaster preparedness and management to supplement immediate relief measures. The necessary legislative and administrative action has been taken to develop national capacity for disaster preparedness and management, including moving responsibility for disaster management affairs from military to civilian control. We look forward to continued cooperation in strengthening natural disaster preparedness and response capacities at the local, national and regional levels.

Last but not least, my delegation wishes to echo what has been said by many others in underscoring the importance of ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian workers, including United Nations staff. In that connection, I would again like to reiterate that Mongolia, along with other nations, resolutely condemned the barbaric attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad last August. United Nations staff are emissaries of peace. In every corner of the world — under the most difficult and, at times dangerous, circumstances — they dedicate their lives to helping people in need. We pay tribute to the late Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, his colleagues and the many others who have dedicated themselves to the ideals of humankind.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to thank the Secretary-General for the report (A/58/332) he has submitted under agenda item 41 (c), entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". That report provides a complete assessment of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 56/109.

Since the adoption of resolution 56/109, the international community and the three States most affected by the Chernobyl disaster have made considerable efforts to overcome the aftermath of that catastrophe. In that regard, we would like to praise the work of the multidisciplinary international inter-agency mission that studied the humanitarian consequences of the accident as part of the fresh assessment of the Chernobyl situation being carried out by the United Nations. The mission's report on that issue, which was launched in New York in February 2002, gave fresh impetus to the work done by the entire international community to implement a range of initiatives in the region in the areas of health, socio-economic development and environmental protection.

Kazakhstan welcomes the concrete steps mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General that have been taken by Member States to enhance cooperation in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. We believe that the results that have been achieved in that regard provide a concrete example of joint, goal-oriented work by Governments and the United Nations to implement agreements reached.

The implementation of such projects as the one established with the help of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to set up local social and psychological rehabilitation centres in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine and the joint programme by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to reduce people's exposure to food-borne radioactivity, as well as programmes aimed, inter alia, at developing agriculture in the affected regions, points to the fact that a serious approach is being taken to finding effective ways to address those problems. Kazakhstan would also like to hail the assistance that has been provided by the donor community for several projects to study, alleviate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We believe such assistance to be both extremely timely and essential.

At the same time, we agree with the comments contained both in the report of the Secretary-General and in the annexed reports of the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine that current aspects of the Chernobyl problem require strengthened international coordination and cooperation to implement the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the various projects and agreements linked to the Chernobyl problem. We also believe that the role of information and dissemination activities must be enhanced in order to draw the international community's attention to events of such devastating scope and consequences as the Chernobyl catastrophe. In that regard, my delegation supports the proposal to declare 26 April the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Radiation Accidents and Catastrophes. We also support, and will join in sponsoring, the draft resolution on Chernobyl to be introduced at the General Assembly during this session.

The Chernobyl tragedy, which affected three States in particular, is an event that was keenly felt in my country, on whose territory the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground was located — a place where, over more than 40 years, approximately 500 nuclear devices were tested. Those tests caused tremendous harm to the health of the population and environment of Kazakhstan. Statistics indicate that approximately 1.5 million people received very high doses of radiation. The highest level of oncological disease in Kazakhstan affects the inhabitants of the Semipalatinsk region. Since 1950, the infant mortality rate has increased by a factor of 10, and life expectancy has been dropping steadily.

We are grateful to the world community for its support in providing humanitarian and social economic assistance and in helping rehabilitate the environment in the Semipalatinsk region. At the same time, we see that there is an acute need to enhance and increase the international community's efforts to implement the provisions of the relevant resolutions on Semipalatinsk and the recommendations on mobilizing financial resources.

The Chernobyl catastrophe continues to be an extremely serious problem, not only for the countries most seriously affected, but also for the entire world. We are convinced that possible ways of alleviating and minimizing the consequences of this tragedy, as well as the tragedy of the Semipalatinsk region, involve effective implementation of decisions regarding these problems. To give fresh impetus to cooperation in this area, we need to improve coordination and interaction among all parties to the process at the national, regional and global levels.

Mr. Morales (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Panama is honoured to address this plenary meeting on General Assembly agenda item 40 (b), on behalf of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

Our countries attach special importance to the Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES), as a subregional political framework which, institutionally, represents the commitment of the Central American region to sustainable development.

ALIDES has been an appropriate mechanism for establishing our subregional priorities in the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental areas. Through this initiative, Central America has sought to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and special economic assistance for the subregion.

Through ALIDES, we the Central American nations have focused our efforts on achieving greater and more effective agreement on macroeconomic policies and enhanced modernization of our energy, transportation and telecommunications infrastructures. This Alliance has also been a uniquely important factor in the significant progress we have made towards consolidating peace, based on democratic processes and unswerving respect for human rights, as well as in efforts to achieve the safety and security of our citizens and regional integration.

All that notwithstanding, we have noted with concern the significant reduction in the past two years in non-reimbursable cooperation of donor countries in both regional and national contexts. This has occurred at a time when there has been a considerable decline in investment resources throughout the Central American region.

Despite that, we wish to underscore on this occasion the work being carried under the ALIDES system by the Central American Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters (CEPREDENAC). This Centre assists our countries in developing more effective strategies to mitigate the impact of natural disasters. It has made great efforts to establish early

warning networks in the various countries of the region.

The Central American countries are delighted at the decision of the CEPREDENAC Board of Directors to hold the "Mitch Plus 5" regional forum, in conjunction with the Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Vulnerabilities and Disasters in Central America and the Regional Programme for Risk Management in Central America, CEPREDENAC-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We are pleased to announce the recent signing in Brussels of a political dialogue and cooperation agreement between the European Union and Central America, which strengthens the process of the San Jose dialogue and also covers economic, immigration and the international fight against terrorism. The outcome of very cordial negotiations, this instrument represents an important step towards strengthening relations between the two regions and towards promoting Central American integration.

We also consider it extremely important to inform Members that, on 12 December 2002, at the European headquarters of the World Bank in Paris, representatives of bilateral and multilateral development agencies renewed their commitment to the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. Our Biological Corridor, with a surface area similar to that of Great Britain, and representing 20 per cent of the territory of Central America, protects an area that stretches from southern Mexico to Panama. Those protected areas are home to 24,000 species of flora and over 500 species of mammals.

The Central American countries wish to reiterate their hope that the sustained support of the international community and the United Nations system, which are vital to attaining the goals contained in the plan of action of our Alliance for Sustainable Development, will continue to be given in the future, because only by mobilizing adequate resources to support this initiative will we be able to alleviate extreme poverty, conserve the environment and provide benefits of sustainable development of this subregion.

As proof of the commitment not only of our countries, but of the entire region, this year we will submit once again the draft resolution on international assistance and cooperation for the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America. We request the firm support of other Member States for that draft resolution.

Mr. Mekel (Israel): I would like to devote my statement to item 40 (e), entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people". Unfortunately, the issue addressed by this item was highly misrepresented during this debate.

Israel supports efforts made by the donor and international communities to alleviate the hardships of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is sensitive to the humanitarian and economic needs of the Palestinian people and views the addressing of those needs as a fundamental Israeli interest.

The provision of assistance to the Palestinian people is a primary component of Israeli policy, arising from our belief that stimulating the economic growth of the Palestinian economy and enhancing the welfare of the Palestinian population is integral to the future of our region.

Despite Israel's mounting security concerns, we have endeavoured, to the greatest extent possible, to permit a steady flow of food, medicine, humanitarian assistance and other essential supplies. We have done our utmost to ensure that our legitimate security precautions affect Palestinian life and economic activity as little as possible.

We further welcome the efforts of Member States, as well as those of various international agencies and organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to improve the living conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is committed to ensuring that those organizations are empowered to fulfil their humanitarian and development mandates, despite the extremely difficult security situation on the ground.

In the debate on this agenda item, the Palestinian Observer referred extensively to the deteriorating economic and humanitarian condition of the Palestinians, blaming Israel's security measures for that situation.

While the increasing hardship faced by the Palestinians is a sad truth, the presentation of Israel's

actions as the cause of this suffering is disingenuous — it is as if one were to begin a story from the middle.

In actuality, the Palestinian plight is due to two factors — the first being the corruption of the Palestinian leadership, and the second being the onslaught of Palestinian terrorism.

I would like first to focus on corruption. One month ago, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) disclosed that its own audit had uncovered the fact that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat had, between 1995 and 2000, diverted fully $900 million from the budget of the Palestinian Authority into a special bank account under his personal control. According to IMF representative Karim Nashashibi, the money — which came from tax revenues collected by Israel and turned over to Arafat — was used to invest in 69 domestic and foreign commercial companies, whose actual owners were not disclosed. That report of the IMF is hardly surprising. It merely confirms what has long been known about the corrupt nature of Arafat and of the Palestinian leadership.

For example, a European Union audit disclosed that $20 million in Egyptian funds meant to build low-income housing was instead used to build a luxury apartment complex that was given over to top Palestinian Authority officials and Arafat cronies. Last year, Jaweed al-Ghussein, the former Chairman of the Palestinian National Fund, revealed that Arafat had taken more than a half billion dollars in Palestinian public funds and transferred it to his own personal accounts.

Over time, Arafat has accumulated well over $1 billion in personal wealth. With greedy despots such as Yasser Arafat refusing to relinquish the helm, the international community must accept nothing less than total transparency when extending its assistance to the Palestinian people.

This money is not only plundered for personal gain, it is also diverted to finance terrorism — the second and more acute cause of Palestinian hardship.

Following the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israel made substantial efforts to facilitate Palestinian-Israeli economic cooperation in the context of the peace process. As a result, there had been a marked expansion of Palestinian trade and employment in Israel, as well as other forms of economic cooperation, from 1994 until the outbreak of the present violence.

Israel, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, had taken a broad range of actions since 1994 in order to promote and improve the free movement of goods and labour from the Palestinian Authority areas into Israel. In addition, industrial parks have been set up in the Palestinian Authority involving substantial Israeli investment and economic incentives. Those measures have had a significant positive impact on the Palestinian economy.

However, the Palestinian leadership's decision, following the Camp David Summit of July 2000, to employ violence as a political tool sabotaged Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation and left Israel with no choice but to implement essential security measures in order to defend itself from Palestinian terrorism. The acute security threat presented by Palestinian terrorism makes these measures unavoidable if Israel is to fulfil its duty as a sovereign State to safeguard the lives of its citizens.

It must be stressed that the purpose of the security precautions is not so-called collective punishment. Israel has no desire unduly to burden the Palestinian population, but, rather, to ensure the security of Israeli citizens facing daily threats to their very lives.

The Secretary-General's report (A/58/88) recognizes the terrorist attacks by Palestinians against Israelis as a cause of the present crisis. The challenge Israel faces is to do its utmost to protect its citizens, while doing as much as it can to minimize the impact of tightened security on the Palestinian population, among whom terrorists hide and operate, in violation of international humanitarian law. This is not an easy job, and it involves excruciating dilemmas of balancing conflicting human rights, the most important of which is the right to life itself. Israel has taken calculated risks in order to try to close the gap between security needs on the one hand and humanitarian needs on the other.

Despite the difficult reality presented by the terrorists, who show no respect for life or for law, Israeli policy makes every effort to minimize harm to the civilian population and to differentiate it from the terrorists that callously use civilians as human shields. If calm prevails in any particular area, improvements are implemented there independently of other areas. In addition, Israel is working with the donor community and United Nations agencies on mechanisms to optimize and facilitate humanitarian activities, access

and movement under the present security circumstances. That effort is noted in the Secretary-General's report.

On 25 May 2003, with the adoption of the road map, the Government of Israel immediately began to implement measures meant to ease conditions for the Palestinian population, in anticipation of the Palestinian Authority's fulfilment of its primary road map obligation — to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure.

Those Israeli steps included the following: the transfer of Israeli security responsibility to the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, and the withdrawal of its forces from that area; authorization for 40,000 Palestinian workers and merchants to enter Israel daily from the West Bank and Gaza in order to strengthen the Palestinian economy; the authorization of the daily employment of an additional 15,000 workers in the special industrial parks located between Israel and the Palestinian Authority areas, giving a further boost to the Palestinian economy; the opening of shipping terminals allowing daily access for about 2,000 trucks carrying merchandise, produce and raw materials into and out of the West Bank and Gaza from Israel, Jordan and Egypt; the authorization of tourist entry into Bethlehem and Jericho, important sources of income for the Palestinian economy; the elimination of roadblocks and checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza in order to improve freedom of movement for the Palestinian population; and the extension of the Palestinian fishing zone out to 12 miles from the Gaza coast in order to strengthen that key economic sector.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority, for its part, did nothing to fulfil its road map obligation to fight the terrorist organizations, and terrorists used every Israeli attempt to ease conditions of Palestinian daily life as an opportunity to renew their attacks on Israeli citizens. They took advantage of the increased freedom of movement to smuggle weapons between villages and cities, they exploited this freedom of movement to smuggle fugitives, arms, mortar bombs, artillery rockets and even suicide belts between villages and cities and they exploited workers' passage into Israel to infiltrate Israeli cities and carry out suicide attacks.

Although Israel experienced numerous fatal terrorist attacks and smaller scale suicide bombings, it continued its policy of easing conditions for Palestinians until 19 August when a suicide bomber, taking advantage of Israel's economic gestures to the Palestinians, infiltrated Jerusalem and detonated himself on a city bus, killing 23 people, including 6 children and infants, and wounding over 130. Needless to say, Israel was left with no choice but to again implement the security measures that are necessary to protect its population.

This illustrates that the unfortunate condition of the local civilian population is due, more than any other factor, to the terrorists themselves and to the Palestinian Authority which, despite its road map obligations, allows terrorists free rein. This terrorism hurts Israelis and Palestinians alike; an end to this situation is dependent, first and foremost, upon an end to violence and terrorism.

Consequently, the Palestinian claim, made here today, that the economic and humanitarian plight of the Palestinians is due to Israeli security measures ignores the connection between cause and effect. If there were no terrorism, there would be no need for tightened security and none of the negative economic and humanitarian effects that it engenders.

If the concern of the Palestinian observer for the population in the territories is sincere, then he should be confronting the terrorist organizations operating within the areas of the Palestinian Authority and stopping their violence, rather than blaming Israel for having to protect itself.

At the end of the day, the welfare and safety of both Palestinian and Israeli peoples is inextricably tied to the fulfilment, once and for all, of the Palestinian obligation to fight and dismantle terrorism, in accordance with international law, United Nations resolutions and the road map. It is this that would obviate the need for Israeli security measures and pave the way for peaceful negotiations, based on mutual recognition and mutual compromise, which are the true guarantee of the welfare, prosperity and security of the peoples of the region.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): The Ethiopian delegation would like to convey its thanks to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on agenda item 40 (b), regarding emergency humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by Morocco, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We would like to welcome Mr. Jan Egeland, the newly appointed United Nations Under-

Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Our appreciation also goes to his predecessor, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, and the organization he led, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for a job well done during these trying years.

Recurrent droughts have affected Ethiopia during the last 30 years, but their severity and duration varied. The droughts that affected the country in the early seventies and mid-eighties caused enormous human suffering and deaths. During the last ten years, there have been droughts three to four years out of ten. During this time, the prevalence and area coverage of drought increased sharply, but deaths caused by famine and human suffering were checked.

In terms of area coverage and the number of people affected, the drought that affected the country during 2002-2003 is more severe than any the country faced before it. The multi-agency assessment team estimated that a total of 13.2 million people, or some 20 per cent of the population, were at risk beginning January 2003. Their food needs were estimated at 1.4 million tons.

Supporting such a large number of people has been possible because of the Government's Emergency Food Security Reserve, which is designed to cover emergency requirements of food for approximately four months for some 4 to 5 million people. Further more, the credible early warning system and advocacy by the Government, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, donor representatives and the media, coupled with timely and generous responses by donors, averted unprecedented human suffering.

Allow me at this juncture to thank all those who extended a helping hand, specifically the United States, the European Union and the various United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan for the commitment and interest he has shown by appointing a personal representative to advise him in finding lasting solutions for the problem in the region.

Relief support to save the lives of millions of affected people is a noble act. But it will not solve the basic problems that make Ethiopians susceptible to recurrent drought. In the long run, the most important step is to strengthen the capacity of countries like Ethiopia to grow more. The pivotal point here is to link relief to development and, as stated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to create a second Green Revolution in Africa. That way we can mitigate poverty and effectively avert the hunger and malnutrition that haunt the continent.

By the same token, when he launched the Millennium Challenge Account initiative, President Bush emphasized that the account may be used to "increase harvest where hunger is greatest". We hope that these just words will be realized soon. The European Union has also long engaged itself in the search for long-term and lasting solutions for the food security problem in Ethiopia. The Union has committed itself through budget support and the Cotonou Agreement financial allocations. We are grateful for such useful supports.

In order to mitigate the effects of recurrent drought and to ensure food security in the short term, the Ethiopian Government is taking measures such as water harvesting, resettlement, conservation based agriculture, improving livestock production and marketing. The resettlement programme the Government is undertaking tries to avoid as much as possible the associated economic and social problems. The present resettlement programme is fully voluntary and avoids mixing of peoples of different cultures and languages in order to minimize any social problems that might crop up between the settlers and local population. To mitigate problems associated with competition for resources between settlers and local populations, the programme is planned and executed at the grass-roots level with the full participation of the people.

Realizing that mere economic growth or an increase in agricultural productivity will not eliminate food deficiency, the Government has focused on poverty eradication policies. To this effect, the country's sustainable development and poverty-reduction programme has been built on agriculture-led industrialization and food security, against the backdrop of justice system and civil service reform, good governance, decentralization and empowerment, as well as capacity-building.

Ethiopia's food security strategy aims to address both the supply and demand sides of the food equation: availability and entitlement. This could be achieved by ensuring food security at both national and household

levels. The strategy is targeted mainly at chronically food-insecure, moisture-deficit and pastoral areas.

Finally, while expressing our thanks and appreciation to the international community for its timely and generous humanitarian assistance to the drought-affected people of Ethiopia, I appeal to it to help the Government in its endeavour to eliminate the root causes of poverty and famine.

Mr. Taha (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable report (A/58/225) submitted under agenda item 40 (b) and to express appreciation for the efforts made by the United Nations and other international organizations that are part of the United Nations family. We would also like to thank all of the brotherly and friendly countries that have continued to provide us with assistance, particularly during and before the period covered by the report — a period during which the Sudan had to face a great many problems resulting from natural and other causes.

My Government's desire for peace throughout the territory of the Sudan is absolute. Anybody involved in the peace process will be aware that the Government has spared no effort in its attempt to achieve peace and put an end to war, so as to make it possible for us to effectively mobilize our efforts and use our many resources for the well-being and development of our population, as well as to provide assistance and support to regional organizations for development throughout the entire region.

Considerable progress has been made this year towards achieving peace in the Sudan. Indeed, we have almost achieved our objective. I believe that the ongoing talks in Kenya will be the last round of talks and we will finally put an end to the longest civil war on the African continent.

I feel able to say, in a spirit of optimism, that the necessary foundation for the achievement of progress in reaching a final agreement seems to have been established. We believe that the great encouragement and positive response that we have received from the international community, as reflected in the statements that we have heard from a number of countries and regional organizations in this Hall, will allay the fears of States and organizations regarding our ability to begin a new chapter in our history.

Preserving the peace requires even greater effort and resolve than actually achieving peace in the first place. We would like to associate ourselves with the conclusions of the Secretary-General in his report, in particular those regarding the dire and urgent need to preserve security and to create social institutions after peace has been achieved. We would also like to associate ourselves with the comments expressed in paragraph 103 of the report, which indicates that assistance partners must act urgently to create mechanisms to consolidate the foundations of any negotiated peace.

We have elaborated a number of plans and strategies for the post-conflict period. In this connection, I would like to refer to the funds that have been set up or are being set up to assist in reconstruction in the south, whether under the auspices of the League of Arab States or other parties. A fund was also set up at the Islamic Summit meeting recently held in Malaysia with a view to supporting reconstruction in the south.

At the national level, the Government of Sudan has set up a fund for the reconstruction of the south and other war-stricken areas. That fund has now moved beyond the stage of planning, strategy and needs and has begun to mobilize assistance. We hope that the United Nations and the specialized agencies will also be involved in the reconstruction effort, because their commitment will indeed make it possible for reconstruction and for consolidating the foundations of peace.

Mr. Amirbayov (Azerbaijan): The strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations is an issue that is of great importance from our national perspective as a matter of principle.

Experience during the past decade proves that the effective and timely distribution of emergency humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons suffering in various ongoing conflicts throughout the world depends on the availability of international, regional and local resources. Tackling this challenge is far beyond the capacity of individual States or organizations and requires a collective response on the part of major actors at all levels. Furthermore, it necessitates effective coordination among an increased number of humanitarian actors in the field — actors with different

kinds of expertise, mandates and resources — and their collaboration with local authorities. As a natural part of any humanitarian effort, the local authorities, in their turn, must ensure safe and unhindered functioning of humanitarian personnel acting in the field.

While fully understanding that primary responsibility for a solution to the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) rests with the countries concerned, one can hardly disregard the fact that national efforts to that end may not necessarily be similar from country to country. The substance and quality of these efforts would certainly differ, depending on factors such as the security and development situation of a country, availability of extrabudgetary resources and a country's experience in handling refugee situations.

This is particularly evident in situations where countries suffer from the consequences of protracted conflict. Azerbaijan, a small developing country with an economy in transition and a total population of 8 million, has for 15 years been home to 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of the armed aggression and continuing occupation by Armenia of Azerbaijan's territories.

Ten years have passed since both the Security Council, in its four resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), and the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/114, entitled "Emergency international assistance to refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan", adopted at the forty-eighth session, expressed their grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Azerbaijan and appealed to all States and organizations to provide adequate and sufficient financial, medical and material assistance to the refugees and IDPs in my country. On behalf of these people I would like to thank all those who provided and continue to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to this vulnerable group of people.

However, despite the contributions of donors and the activities of relevant humanitarian actors, the protracted character of this armed conflict and the lack of progress towards a settlement have had a negative impact on the situation of refugees and IDPs in Azerbaijan. Due to insufficient funding and a shortage of humanitarian assistance we are seeking possible ways to offer immediate responses to the current demands of refugees and IDPs, although the long-term resolution of this problem is inevitably linked to settlement of the conflict and the return of refugees and IDPs to their places of origin.

The decreasing volume of humanitarian assistance accompanied by the departure of foreign aid agencies which have assisted with the provision of food and materials to refugee camps for the past decade, has caused despair and frustration — in the first place, among the affected population. Massive economic transformation and restricted financial resources have curtailed the capacity of Azerbaijan to provide basic social services for refugees and IDPs. Currently, the volume of humanitarian assistance does not cover the most pressing needs of this fragile part of our society.

Nevertheless, the Government of Azerbaijan, using its limited resources, spares no effort to mitigate the suffering of the affected population, and has recently made a further allocation of more than $70 million to the construction of housing for refugees. However, being stuck in a situation of "no war, no peace" in its conflict with Armenia, and confused in the transition from relief to development, Azerbaijan must nevertheless keep up with the demands of its refugees and internally displaced persons. Another issue is that the United Nations and its institutions acting in Azerbaijan, having shifted from the phase of emergency humanitarian assistance to the stage of development, do not adequately respond to the estimated needs. This is a situation where a clear-cut balance should be struck between the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance and activities for recovery and development. In our view, correctly proportioned assistance, applied in the right place at the right time, requires the integration of Government into the planning and coordination phases from the very start so that Government can effectively integrate its own resources with those provided by the international community.

In our particular case, Azerbaijani concerns stemming from the premature application of the stage of transition from relief to development, a stage which is more relevant to the post-conflict rehabilitation stage, must be addressed, including with respect to our concern to ensure the sustainability of the return of the refugees and internally displaced persons to their native lands. Effective transition from relief to development in the situation of a protracted conflict should envisage continuation of the delivery of

emergency humanitarian assistance during the initial stages of transition. Moreover, development-related projects ought not to be carried out at the expense of emergency humanitarian assistance.

The role of United Nations country teams led by Resident Coordinators should be of primary importance for the definition and formulation of coherent, flexible strategies based on the specifics of the country concerned and the availability of resources. In that context, we agree with the proposal put forward in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/58/89), on the basis of the observation that the effective transfer from the usual humanitarian assistance coordination system to that of United Nations Resident Coordinators, which would maintain appropriate levels of capacity and support during emergencies and transition, will be possible only if the Resident Coordinator system is strengthened. More flexibility in utilizing existing financial resources would allow the Resident Coordinators to carry out more efficiently the assessment and consequent financing of humanitarian needs.

Effective and timely United Nations assistance to mitigate the humanitarian situation is a key factor in ensuring protection of the civilian population during armed conflict. I would like to hope that our deliberations today will pave the way, if not for progress in bringing such conflicts to an end, then at least for a clearer definition and understanding of what should constitute a humanitarian response that is sufficient to adequately meet the needs of refugees and displaced persons.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General for his reports on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance. We support the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The importance of humanitarian issues resulting from conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics has prompted the Assembly to adopt, inter alia, resolution 46/182, which emphasizes what is at stake and proposes solutions. In the same context, the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2) and the Brahimi report (A/55/305) took a detailed and instructive approach to this question. Since then, a great deal of experience has been gained. Those involved in emergency situation management have constantly combined their efforts in order to make humanitarian action more operational.

Analysis of the reports before us, which describe in detail the problems under consideration, leads my delegation to say that the record of developments in the humanitarian situation in the past year is uneven. This is due, on the one hand, to the upsurge of conflicts and disasters in some parts of the world and, on the other hand, to their mitigation in other parts of the world, making concerted solutions necessary among the actors involved at the international, regional, subregional and national levels.

The diversity of actors in the humanitarian field and the multidimensional nature of the questions to be resolved require coordination and close collaboration between the General Assembly and other United Nations organs and agencies on the one hand, and the other actors involved on the other. This also presupposes a concise definition of humanitarian aid with a view to focusing its mandate and operations on what is essential.

My delegation acknowledges the primary responsibility of States in the protection of civilians. However, one must not underestimate the responsibility of other actors, especially those in conflict. We welcome the organization of regional workshops on the issue, as reflected in paragraph 10 of the report, and we hope that the conclusions of such workshops will be broadly disseminated. We believe that the Secretary-General's recommendations contained in the three reports on the subject will help to further guide the international community's activities. The aide-mémoire and the road map now being finalized will also be of great usefulness.

We appreciate the interest aroused by the safety and security of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and personnel of humanitarian organizations. In that context, the Security Council's recent adoption of resolution 1502 (2003) strengthens the instruments in force; it is incumbent on the international community to ensure their implementation.

The issue of the relationship between humanitarian and military personnel deserves attention. We appreciate the provisions prepared by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and hope that

they will enable us to find appropriate solutions in that regard.

With respect to refugees and displaced persons, it is useful to emphasize the large numbers involved and to note that, despite the issue's general nature, it is appropriate to take a case-by-case approach, which would permit the sharing of experiences within the framework of a comparative advantage approach. Thus the Angolan experience, as described in paragraph 15, is worth sharing.

My delegation welcomes the IASC's consideration of issues related to vulnerable persons — particularly women — and to exploitation and sexual violence in humanitarian crisis situations. We believe that the IASC's elaboration of a series of policies, strategies and guidelines aimed at ensuring systematic consideration of women's priorities, experiences and particular needs and the adoption of an action plan for protection against exploitation and sexual violence in humanitarian crisis situations, developed by the working group on the problem, will contribute to a better understanding of those phenomena with a view to finding appropriate solutions.

In order to ensure that humanitarian action is operational, we should strengthen coordination and cooperation among all humanitarian actors, particularly public and civil society actors. In that connection, we welcome the ongoing initiatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs with the United Nations Development Programme, on the one hand, and with the United Nations Environment Programme, on the other, in the framework of global disaster management and an international partnership on an integrated approach to prevention, preparation and interventions in urgent environmental situations with a view to promoting sustainable development.

We appreciate the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in Southern African and the Horn of Africa, which have enabled us to alleviate the devastating effects of the drought and HIV/AIDS and to undertake adequate measures. We encourage the IASC to complete the guidelines on organizing emergency interventions to ensure the integration of elements related to HIV/AIDS into all relevant planning fields, so as to facilitate global anti-HIV/AIDS action in humanitarian crises.

Furthermore, we note with concern the considerations affecting the financing of humanitarian activities, as described in the report. The three issues of the sufficiency of humanitarian aid, its equitable distribution and its effective management are more topical than ever. We are also concerned about the increase in the volume of activities that parallels a decline in official development assistance. The provisions of paragraph 11 of the annex to resolution 46/182 should continue to guide donors' activities aimed at dealing with that problem.

My delegation shares the observations made in the report on the financing issue. We reaffirm that, given the interests at stake, the allocation of resources must be based on needs in order to avoid undertaking disparate activities with limited capacity to intervene. In addition, donors will have to show greater confidence in the United Nations coordination system and facilitate the establishment of mechanisms that will enable it to demonstrate greater flexibility, by increasing the amount of resources that are not reserved for specific use in emergency situations.

As the Assembly may note, my delegation's interest in the item under consideration results from the situation of Africa in general and the West African subregion in particular, where natural disasters and especially conflicts have occurred in recent years. My country, Guinea — which borders on countries of the subregion that are in a post-conflict situation — has suffered humanitarian and other types of consequences. The prolonged presence of refugees and the displacement of persons within the country after the rebel attacks of 2000 have affected the socio-cultural infrastructure and diverted funds initially intended for development programmes.

The Government of Guinea, mindful of its international commitments and faithful to its African humanitarian tradition, has not only agreed to make enormous efforts to contain that situation's effects but has also participated with other actors of the international community — most particularly those of the subregion — in efforts to restore security, peace and stability in the subregion in general and more particularly in the countries affected by the conflicts. In the light of our experience, my delegation attaches sustained importance to the issue of the capacity to coordinate humanitarian operations and the establishment of new competences related to the principal aspects of transition: peace-building, socio-economic recovery and re-establishment of the institutions of civil administration and of Government.

I cannot conclude without highlighting the importance of preventing natural disasters and conflicts. In that regard, we welcome the existing structures — particularly the early-warning instruments and means of United Nations departments and bodies and the Economic and Social Council's Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict, as well as the Security Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, whose activities deserve to be supported. We should also devote attention to the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report on prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985). Finally, we hope that the second World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, to be held in Kobe, Japan, from 18 to 22 January 2005, will serve as an opportunity to meet countries' expectations and needs, given the negative effects of such disasters.

Mr. Šahović (Serbia and Montenegro): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and informative reports submitted under the agenda item under consideration.

The reports clearly indicate that humanitarian operations are becoming more complex and larger, both in scale and number. At the same time, the work of the humanitarian personnel all over the world is becoming increasingly dangerous, and is being carried out under extremely difficult conditions. The tragic event that took place on 19 August of this year in Baghdad is the latest demonstration of the serious, and indeed deadly, threats to the safety and security of United Nations personnel. Obviously, a strengthened and unified security management system for the United Nations is needed, as stated in the report contained in document A/58/344. Humanitarian staff need to operate in as secure and safe an environment as possible in order to deliver assistance successfully.

We believe that the ultimate goal of humanitarian assistance in post-conflict situations is to ensure that durable solutions are found, thereby setting the stage for sustainable development. As recognized in resolution 2003/5 of the Economic and Social Council, it is of critical importance for the successful management of transition from relief to development that more support is given to recovery and long-term development activities, capacity-building at all relevant levels and the enhancement of national ownership. The issue of transition from relief to development should be further considered in an integrated manner, with a view to better understanding the implications of that process while working out the programmes of humanitarian and development organizations.

From our experience as a country receiving humanitarian assistance, and as indicated in the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/58/89, we know that coordination in the context of the transition from relief to development is a demanding and time-critical process that requires the full engagement of Governments and donors at the early stages. The process of coordination among providers, and between providers and recipients of assistance, should be constantly reviewed and adjusted to the real needs in the field to make it more efficient and avoid competition, overlapping and duplication of activities. In order to improve coherence and to give clear, consolidated and timely guidance to the United Nations system, we fully support the establishment of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group Joint Working Group on Transition Issues.

I would like to focus in particular on document A/58/358, entitled "Economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the developments in the Balkans". The report contains a comprehensive review regarding economic assistance provided, especially to the countries of South-Eastern Europe. The report also attests to the seriousness of the economic problems that those States, including mine, are confronting.

As stated in the report, few countries in the region have managed to embark on a path of sustained growth, and many of them still face macro-economic stabilization problems and are lagging in the process of integration into the European economy. We therefore fully agree with the conclusions in the report that continued donor support, the participation of regional organizations and the involvement of the private sector will be essential for reconstruction, stabilization and development in the Balkans.

In that regard, regional cooperation mechanisms are of key importance. The Thessaloniki agenda for the Western Balkans, which is referred to in the report, represents a significant step forward in the relationship between the European Union and the region. Its implementation should, inter alia, facilitate and accelerate our transition from relief to development. The activities of other regional actors, such as the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the European

Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank and other partners are also very important. They have a leading role to play in areas such as the rebuilding of infrastructure, promoting the private sector and attracting much-needed investment.

Serbia and Montenegro is profoundly restructuring its economy. In doing so it is mobilizing its internal resources to overcome its dire starting position and to reform rapidly. Our aim is to complete the relief-to-development process and to implement development policies that promote durable solutions and strengthen national capacities to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable. The ongoing reform and recovery programme is painful. It is also coupled with some negative effects that include, for example, rising unemployment and increased costs in basic services, which affect many segments of society.

Now that the difficult task of reconstruction is underway, resources tend to be scarce. Unfortunately, humanitarian assistance is decreasing due to a shift in donor funding to emergencies in other parts of the world. However, humanitarian assistance is still needed to address widespread poverty, fragile basic services and the needs of one of the largest displaced populations in Europe, namely, the over 380,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia and the approximately 260,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), most of whom are from Kosovo and Metohija. Of special importance to us is the assistance, financial and otherwise, of Member States and international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of our national strategy to resolve the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons. That national strategy, which has been integrated into the overall development strategy and reform programme of the country, reaffirms our commitment to find durable solutions to the problems of refugees and IDPs. Serbia and Montenegro is also cooperating bilaterally and regionally with neighbouring countries to comprehensively address the plight of refugees.

As for IDPs, we welcome the fact that the IDP Unit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is operational, reflecting the need to solve the complex problems of a growing number of IDPs. In that context, we would like to point to the specific nature of the problem of IDPs in Serbia and Montenegro. We call upon the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to enhance its efforts to fulfil the obligations stemming from Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and to create the necessary conditions for the safe return of IDPs.

The transition from relief to development in my country has also had an impact on the work of the programmes and agencies of the United Nations. Humanitarian coordination, under the Resident Coordinator appointed last year, is aimed at strengthening the links between United Nations agencies and programmes and the national authorities, as well between relevant regional and other development organizations. For our part, we will continue to make efforts to further improve cooperation and coordination in order to enable that mechanism to address actual needs even more effectively. We highly appreciate the engagement of the United Nations system, including that of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the international financial institutions that have continued to assist our country. However, their further input will be necessary.

Finally, allow me to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the humanitarian assistance rendered to my country over the past few years by a number of States referred to in the report contained in document A/58/358, in particular by major contributors such as the European Union and international relief agencies and organizations.

Mr. Musambachime (Zambia): At the outset, I would like to commend the Secretary-General for the very comprehensive and concise report contained in document A/58/89, which has been submitted under this agenda item. The report refers to issues pertinent to my country.

The Secretary-General's report has ably addressed the theme of strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance, with particular attention to humanitarian financing, the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and the transition from relief to development. The report also examines some of the key humanitarian developments and challenges of the past year and addresses some of the key issues related to the protection of civilians and internally displaced persons (IDP), contingency planning, natural disasters and HIV in the context of emergencies.

We welcome the proposals in the report which, among other things, stress the need for increased national and regional capacity-building in the early warning and monitoring of natural hazards, and natural disaster preparedness, mitigation and response by strengthening coordination in the areas of information-sharing and analysis, logistical support, response coordination and the strengthening of relationships with existing regional structures.

Earlier this month, when my delegation spoke at the meeting to discuss the southern African crisis and the related consolidated appeals, which were launched by the United Nations, I took the opportunity to thank the United Nations and its partners, particularly the World Food Programme, for coming to the aid of Southern Africa, including Zambia during the period 2002-2003, thus preventing the famine and mass starvation that would have ensued had it not been for such prompt intervention.

My delegation expresses deep appreciation for the several visits made by Mr. Oshima, former Under-Secretary-General in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We also welcome his successor, Mr. Jan Egeland, and promise our support and cooperation. My delegation also appreciated the visits made to Zambia by Mr. James Morris, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the humanitarian situation in southern Africa. We commend him and his team for their commitment and personal efforts to help the plight of Zambians and others in the Southern African region. During his recent visit to Zambia, Mr. Morris, together with Ms. Machel, met with the President of the Republic of Zambia, Mr. Mwanawasa, and several key ministers, as well as a cross-section of policy-makers and experts on the impact that the HIV pandemic is having on Zambia. The Government is studying the recommendations made, with a view to taking appropriate action.

During the 2001-2002 agricultural season, in response to the food deficit resulting from the drought, the Government put in place a number of meas designed to promote agricultural production enhance food security. These included, first importation of some 200,000 tons of maize; secon the provision of relief food to needy areas; thirdly, introduction of the Food Security Pack program aimed at empowering vulnerable farmers with i credit, and fourthly, the early distribution of fertil by the Food Reserve Agency. As a result of t measures, Zambia produced a higher yield last se than in the previous five years. My Governmen determined to continue with that programme.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to note while major successes have been recorded in both agricultural and social sectors, the HIV pandemi exacerbating the situation. The disease attacks the productive members of society — those who are i agricultural sector and are concerned with production. This has resulted in millions of orph children, widows and elderly people living in a poverty. It is the vulnerable members of our so who need us to ensure that they have access to basic health, water, sanitation and affordable ge drugs to treat or prevent HIV/AIDS. Such attention go a long way towards reversing that hu catastrophe.

I wish to appeal to the Secretary-General, thr the Office for the Coordination of Humanit Affairs, to increase support to Zambia and countries in the region in further enhancing security.

I would like to commend the efforts of the U Nations and the international community for assi Zambia at a time of humanitarian crisis. My co will continue to look to them for support.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.